

Baldwin chats with MHS students

by TABITHA DANIELS

Times-Tribune

Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin took some time out last week to participate in a question answer session with students at Middleton High School.

Baldwin was responding to an email received from students in Patrick Keeler's seventh period social studies class, asking her to join them in a discussion on the recent terrorist attacks.

Other students were also invited to participate, and Baldwin spoke with a packed classroom of students who were not shy about asking the necessary questions.

"Will lifting the ban on assassinations and eliminating Osama bin Laden make him into a martyr?" "How will monies appropriated to the defense effort affect programs already in existence?" "How did this happen? -Was there really such a hole in our intelligence?"

And, as one teacher so bluntly put it, "Are we going to war?"

Baldwin did not break stride as she listened to students' concerns, taking care to answer with patience and authority.

"This is an entirely new type of threat, and I think our response has to be entirely new also," she said. "The question now is how to feel empowered when you feel so powerless... You

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Times-Tribune photo by Tabitha Daniels

U.S. Representative Tammy Baldwin speaks with a group of students during a recent visit to Middleton High School.

BALDWIN

have to get involved."

Baldwin revealed that her own response to the attacks was to make an effort to enhance the information she already possessed in regard to Bin Laden and his terror regime.

"You have to ask questions and gain knowledge," she said.

Baldwin explained her concern for the inhabitants of the areas involved in a possible U.S. strike. She informed students of the complex geographical and population elements necessary for consideration.

"Their country is in the middle of a civil war, and the Taliban controls 90% but quote on quote 30% of the territory is called 'active resistance territory,'" she said. "If we talk about doing anything in Afghanistan is has to be very targeted. A lot of people very proximate to Bin Laden hate him as much as this country does."

Baldwin expressed her hope that President Bush would make informed decisions based on his sources of information. She also discussed possible fates of the budget surplus and large tax cut package.

"At this point, nobody is talking about it," she revealed. "A lot of people, including myself, say we need to safeguard that surplus, but a different view is taken of that in light of the disaster and emergency our country has just faced. I think it will inevitably impact spending decisions we make for next year."

Baldwin concluded that it was too early to decide what programs would be impacted most.

When faced with questions as to the strength of our nation's intelligence, Baldwin attempted to explain the need to tread slowly, then branch out into a more advanced international network.

"I'm hearing a lot of TV commentators say we are weak on human intelligence," she said. "If we want to gain the trust of a terrorist, we can't just walk off the street and say 'Tell me what you're doing.' You must deal with a lot of shady characters."

Baldwin alluded to things that could be accomplished soon in that arena, including working with the intelligence of countries in the area to head off antagonistic relations in favor of establishing closer ties.

She also reminded students of the successes of U.S. Intelligence agencies.

"Our intelligence has protected us from other would be terrorist plots, it's just that we don't know about most of them. The reasoning behind that is we don't want to lose methods or techniques of communication. We don't want to disclose that information," she explained.

Worries about the state of the economy also surfaced in the session.

Baldwin informed students of

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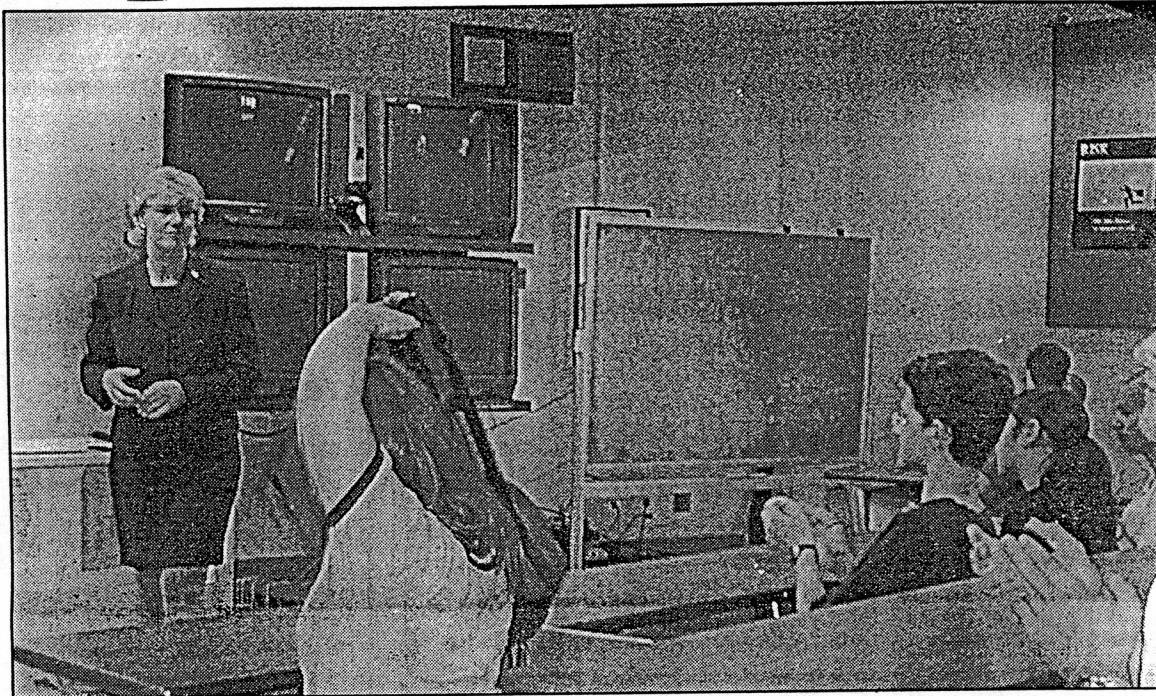
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Times-Tribune photo by Tabitha Daniels

Baldwin is greeted by Middleton High School students during her recent visit to the class.

economists' comparisons between the current market and the status of the market after the beginning of the war in the Persian Gulf.

"In both cases there is a beginning decline, and then a steady recovery," she said. "There will be significant government build-ups - You don't put 40 million into relief, recovery, and defense without it filtering down into other parts of the economy."

Another student concern was the eruption of hate crimes in the United States as a result of the terrorist attacks.

Baldwin assured students the issue was being addressed with care. She revealed that congress had voted on three items before she left to return to Madison last week.

One involved a resolution condemning hate crimes, harassment, or bigotry on basis of race or religion.

"It is illegal to do any of this," she said.

Baldwin encouraged concerned students to volunteer in efforts that work to preserve community relations.

"Giving blood, raising money - That's a great idea. Why not volunteer to escort someone who is frightened? And when you hear someone who is naive or misinformed, it is your responsibility to speak out."

The session concluded with talk of the future of the nation.

Freedoms of the American people will almost certainly clash with efforts in increased security. Baldwin warned that we would see "almost every range of reaction to this imaginable" including censorship. She encouraged students to continue to seek education on matters of foreign relations and to think about how they live their lives.

"As we move forward, we need to think about how we balance freedoms and constitutional liberties with secu-

rity," she expressed.

MHS junior Kerry Sullivan came to the session to get informed, and to "just listen."

Another student of the same mind found herself satisfied with what Baldwin had to say.

"I think this was really helpful because we as students are concerned as much as adults, and it's helpful when you get to talk to someone who's in there, who knows more about it," said student Denitza Koleva.

Koleva was particularly interested in Baldwin's response to the question of harassment.

"We all know that there are bad people from all religions," she said. "I want to help this stop. Why do people harass and treat others badly?"